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SAINTS IN DISGUISE: PERFORMANCE IN *THE LIFE OF JOHN KALYVITES* (BHG 868), *THE LIFE OF THEODORA OF ALEXANDRIA* (BHG 1727) AND *THE LIFE OF SYMEON SALOS* (BHG 1677)

Julie Van Pelt

The last decades have witnessed a growing interest in the study of hagiographical texts as narratives, which has resulted in a more widespread awareness of the fact that these are indeed "highly entertaining, or even impressive from a literary point of view."[1] One of the literary *topoi* that has come out of studies in this field as a major point of interest is the *topos* of secrecy and concealed identity or concealed sanctity.[2] In particular, two holy character types that were highly popular in the Byzantine hagiographical tradition have enjoyed interest from scholars looking at hagiography as literature: the holy fool and the cross-dresser.[3] Both of these types conceal their identities (his/her sanctity, in the case of the fool, and her sex, in the case of the cross-dresser) and consequently have their narratives revolve around the keeping and disclosing of this secret identity.

While indeed a considerable amount of research has been done on hagiographies featuring concealed identity/sanctity, and on the *Lives* of fools and cross-dressers in particular, only few scholars have dealt with this *topos* in a more inclusive way by studying different types of saints together. Britt Dahlman was one of the first to study the cross-dresser and the holy fool as two manifestations of one concept, 'secret holiness', and compares them on the basis that "both the cross-dresser and the holy fool ques-

[1] Rydén 2004, 58.

[2] This *topos* is referred to by Bernard Flusin in his chapter on "le serviteur caché" (2004), and it is discussed under the heading of 'secret holiness' by Britt Dahlman in her study on the so-called Daniel cycle, a collection of short stories that contains tales of holy men and women with a particular focus on secrecy and disguise (2007).

[3] E.g. Rydén 1995, Déroche 1995 and 2000, Krueger 1996, Hotchkiss 1996, Davis 2002, Lubinsky 2013 and Constantinou 2014. On the popularity of *Lives* of cross-dressers and fools in Byzantium, see Constantinou 2014, 344–45.

tion and transgress boundaries, in particular those of gender and sense."[4] Dahlman's observations with regard to the *Narrations* by Daniel of Sketis call for more in-depth comparison between *Lives* of cross-dressers and holy fools in general. Stavroula Constantinou provides such a comparative study of both groups of texts from a literary perspective.[5] In her recent article, she approaches holy fools and cross-dressers as 'holy actors' and 'holy actresses'; by focusing on aspects of the 'performance' of the saint, she examines the literary depiction of the two roles.

Apart from the stories about fools and cross-dressers, Byzantine hagiography features other saints who also hide their identities through forms of disguise. One of them is John Kalyvites, the saint who pretends to be a beggar in front of his parents' house. His *Life* shares important features with *Lives* of cross-dressers and holy fools, not just when it comes to themes, but also when it comes to narrative construction. Therefore, the *Life of John Kalyvites*, as well as other stories like it,[6] may also be included in the study of hagiographical narratives featuring concealed identity and studied in parallel with *Lives* of cross-dressers and fools. All these *Lives* feature 'saints in disguise,' a term I prefer to the more commonly used term 'secret saint,' because the latter seems to denote characters who are secretly a saint (i.e. who hide their holiness, such as the holy fool), thus excluding other types of saints who conceal their identities on other grounds (the cross-dressers, for instance, merely hide their sex in order to be able to reach sanctity, but their holiness in itself is usually not concealed[7]). More accurate when taking together different hagiographical stories dealing with concealed identity is to regard the 'secret saint' as a particular type of 'saint in disguise.' Also, previous studies dealing with 'secret sainthood' or 'secret holiness' have often focused on examining the moral message that is conveyed by the dissimulation of one's sanctity in particular,[8] not on the narrative potential of the *topos* of concealed identity more generally and the results of the saint's disguise on a literary level, which is my intention here.[9] Reading the *Life*

[4] 2007, 73.

[5] Constantinou 2014.

[6] Another example of a hagiographic tale featuring concealed identity other than the *Lives* of fools and cross-dressers is the Greek *Life of Abraham and his Niece Mary,* in which Abraham rescues his niece Mary from a brothel disguised as a soldier (BHG 5–8e).

[7] In the *Life of Euphrosyne* (BHG 625), for instance, the saint clearly excels in asceticism and is therefore most revered among all the brothers in the monastery she resides in. Also Theodora, the protagonist of the *Life* discussed in this chapter, is accepted among the brothers of the monastery because she appears to enjoy God's grace (she is not harmed by the wild animals outside the monastery). It is only after false accusations, against which she fails to defend herself, that Theodora's spiritual status becomes doubtful to the brothers in the monastery.

[8] E.g. Bousset 1922, Ivanov 1998 and Dahlman 2007.

[9] Derek Krueger is the only one to discuss the theme of concealed sanctity in hagiography from a narrative perpective. In the fourth chapter of his book on the *Life of Symeon* he provides a list of

of John Kalyvites (BHG 868)[10] alongside the *Life of Theodora of Alexandria* (BHG 1727),[11] a cross-dresser, and the *Life of Symeon Salos* (BHG 1677),[12] a holy fool,[13] I aim in this chapter to investigate the larger implications of the themes of secrecy and disguise for the overall construction of these three hagiographical texts, which cut across the boundaries of traditional gender divisions and character types.

Following Constantinou, who looks at holy fools and cross-dressers as 'actors' and 'actresses', I shall analyse the 'performance' of these saints in disguise, by which I denote those deeds of the saint which can be described as deliberately deceptive role-playing. The saint 'performs' as (s)he pretends to be someone (s)he is not and consequently plays a part or performs an act for a large part of his/her *Life*. On this interpretative level, then, 'performance' is understood in the narrow sense as a staged public appearance of an individual in front of an audience.

Analysing the performance of the saint in disguise, I am particularly interested in the way in which that performance is *narrated*. My analysis will therefore also engage with another strand of the modern concept of performance, developed in narrative studies, namely the idea that texts are 'performances' in a game between author and reader.[14] Since the so-called 'turn to the reader', literary scholars have started to contend that, if meaning is not inherent in the ink on the paper, then "the meaningful text

features shared by stories on secret saints which are found repeatedly, allowing us to describe a "generic literary type" (1996, 70–71).

[10] I use the edition by O. Lampsides (1966), unless stated otherwise. References to this text will take the form of '*VJohn*' followed by the number of the page and the number of the line. All translations of this text are my own.

[11] I use the first text provided in the edition by K. Wessely (1889), which is a transcription of Paris. Gr. 1468. References to this text will take the form of '*VTheo*' followed by the number of the page and the number of the line in Wessely's text. All translations of this text are my own.

[12] I use the edition by L. Rydén and A. J. Festugière (1974–1977). References to this text will take the form of '*VSym*' followed by the number of the page and the number of the line in Festugière's text. Translations of this text are taken from Krueger 1996.

[13] The choice for these *Lives* is necessarily arbitrary, as many other tales on disguised saints could have served the purposes of this chapter. The *Lives* of Theodora and Symeon have been randomly selected from among the Greek *Lives* of cross-dressers and fools. As for the *Life of John Kalyvites*, I selected it from among other candidates because, in addition to having received far less attention from literary scholars than it deserves, the story represents a rather early case of a Byzantine tale of a disguised saint, and is thought to be the precursor of the more famous story of Alexis the Man of God (BHG 51–56h), which entered the Greek tradition from Syriac, and on which the *Life of John* presumably exerted influence in this process of translation (see Stebbins 1973, 502–4).

[14] This idea has gained ground in the past few decades. See for example MacLean 1988, Issacharoff & Jones 1988, Petrey 1990, Iser 1993, Wirth (ed.) 2002 and Bazerman 2003. Developing the idea that narrative is performance, MacLean and others build on J. L. Austin's speech act theory (1962). The idea of narrative as performance is applied to hagiography by von Contzen 2016.

is always a performance, whether by the writer or the reader".[15] In this context, 'performance' is understood more broadly, not as staged role-playing, but as meaningful action. As defined by Marie MacLean, "performance at its most general and most basic level is a carrying out, a putting into action or into shape".[16] In this light, a narrative can be regarded as 'performing', because it gives shape to the raw material of the story. Of course, its performance depends on being activated by a reader (resulting in a different performance with every new reading), but it performs nonetheless. Following in particular Charles Bazerman, who uses the term as well, I shall refer in the rest of this chapter to the performance of the narrative as 'textual performance'.[17] Textual performance is particularly conspicuous in instances where the text foregrounds the act of narration itself in a more or less explicit way. Such instances can consist of "the narrator's verbal self-thematizations, his or her explicit comments on the story or the act of narration and addresses to the reader".[18] However, more covert narrative strategies, especially the more sophisticated ones, can also focus our attention on the act of narration itself and thus foreground textual performance.

Every narrative is in a way a performance, but in *Lives* of saints in disguise the *story* that is told by the narrative involves performance as well (theatrical role-playing, in this case), a phenomenon defined by Marie MacLean as "embedded performance".[19] Naturally, the two levels of performance are inextricably tied up with each other as the literary portrayal of the performance of the saint always relies on the textual performance of the narrative. The analysis that follows aims to shed light on how intra-diegetic performance (or performance on story-level, i.e. performance by the saint) and textual performance are related in the three selected *Lives*, and to show that their interplay results in an interesting literary game, turning these narratives into enjoyable pieces of literature that may appeal to a wide audience.

DISGUISE

The *Life of John Kalyvites* was probably written towards the end of the sixth century, although its precise dating is unsure.[20] It recounts the story of a young boy called John who lives in Constantinople and is raised by his parents to pursue a worldly career and get married. John, however, secretly dreams of a life of asceticism. One day, he meets a

[15] Bazerman 2003, 382.
[16] MacLean 1988, xi.
[17] Bazerman 2003.
[18] Berns 2009, 96.
[19] MacLean 1988, 12–13.
[20] Baguenard 1988, 196.

monk and begs him to take him to his monastery. The monk agrees and John runs away from home. After having lived in the monastery for six years, the devil inflicts on him the desire to see his parents again. With the abbot's permission, John returns home. However, instead of making himself known, he pretends to be a beggar. His parents do not recognize him for three years and his mother even has him removed from her porch. When John's death is near, he sends for his parents, who recognize the Bible they once gave to their son. Then, John finally reveals his identity and dies.

Crucial in this story of humility is the fact that John is not recognized by his parents. His anonymity and the concealment of his identity are key in achieving an extraordinary level of asceticism, as they allow him to defy the devil's plans by even enhancing his burden rather than giving in to it.[21] An important factor in making this possible as well as plausible on a narrative level, is what we may call the 'disguise' of the saint. John's appearance undergoes drastic changes before his return to Constantinople. First, during his stay in the monastery, John's excessive asceticism transforms his body radically and turns him into a ghostlike figure.[22] Then, while travelling home, he meets a beggar and switches clothes with him.[23] These changes prove very effective later on in the narrative: the first thing the housekeeper notices when he sees John are his stained and ragged clothes,[24] while his mother is shocked at the sight of a "wild" and "barefoot" man lying outside her home.[25] When John then states: "I am a beggar,"[26] this statement is received readily by his audience. Thus, the changes to John's outward appearance raise certain expectations in the intra-diegetic audience and thereby support the performance of the saint, which aligns him with other saints in disguise, whose appearance is also crucial for their performances.

This is not in the least so for women who enter male monasteries. The *Life of Theodora,*[27] presumably also dated to the sixth century,[28] is no exception. It tells of a woman

[21] What Arietta Papaconstantinou remarks on the *Life of Theodora* thus perfectly applies to John's case as well, namely that non-recognition (and especially not making yourself known to your beloved ones) constitutes a certain vigour in asceticism (2004, 74).

[22] *VJohn* 8.36–37: διότι ἡ πολλὴ ἐγκράτεια καὶ ἡ νηστεία καταφθείρει τὸ σῶμα and 9.5–7: ὥστε, ὡς εἶπον, ἐκ τῆς πολλῆς νηστείας καὶ ἀγρυπνίας καὶ τοῦ πολλοῦ πόθου τῶν γονέων μὴ αὐταρκῆσαι τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ, ἀλλὰ γενέσθαι αὐτὸν ὡς σκιὰν θανάτου.

[23] *VJohn* 10.9–13.

[24] *VJohn* 10.27: βλέπει αὐτὸν κατεστιγμένον καὶ ῥακοδυτοῦντα.

[25] I follow here exceptionally the reading provided in PG 114, 577 which mentions ἀνυπόδητον in addition to ἄγριον (also mentioned in the text provided by Lampsides at 11.7).

[26] *VJohn* 10.30: ἄνθρωπός εἰμι πτωχός.

[27] The *Life of Theodora* has mainly been studied in relation to other *Lives* of cross-dressers. More detailed analysis is provided by Papaconstantinou 2004, Constantinou 2005 (chapter 3) and Capron 2013, 125–169.

[28] Papaconstantinou 2004, 68.

who, after committing adultery, runs away from her husband out of shame and guilt. She cuts her hair, dresses in men's clothes and presents herself in a male monastery as Theodore. There, she undergoes subsequent trials that test her faith. One day, she is sent to deliver a message and sleeps in the stables of a neighbouring monastery. At night, the daughter of the abbot enters the stables and, thinking that Theodora is a man, tries to seduce her. Theodora refuses and the girl has intercourse with another man. When she discovers that she is pregnant, she blames Theodora. After the child is born, it is brought to the monastery where Theodora stays and both she and the child are cast outside to survive in the wilderness. There, she is attacked by the devil several times until she nearly dies. Eventually, she is admitted back into the monastery where she and the child are locked up in a small cell, until Theodora passes away. Her real identity is meanwhile revealed to the abbot in a dream. When they find her body and discover that she is indeed a woman, they spread the news.

As in most *Lives* of cross-dressers, the change in the outward appearance of the saint, which consists of cutting her hair and changing into men's clothing, clearly marks the beginning of her male performance, allowing her to pass as the opposite gender.[29] Moreover, as Laurent Capron notes, in the *Life of Theodora* clothing and changes of dress play an important role, as the theme reappears time and again to mark transitions in Theodora's life.[30] As such, her disguise, consisting primarily of clothes that conceal her true nature, is not only successful in convincing her (intra-diegetic) audience that she is a man (with the crucial turning-point event of being seduced and falsely accused as a result), but it also adds to the overall theatrical and dramatic dimension of the text.[31] In particular, the initial 'trans-vesting' scene is treated rather elaborately in the *Life of Theodora*, as (contrary to most other *Lives* of cross-dressers) the text specifically mentions not only the clothes she puts on, but also the clothes she takes *off*, as well as the golden jewellery she was wearing.[32] This detail is symbolic for her change of lifestyle and emphasizes that, from this point onwards, she leaves behind her sinful past and becomes a new person in the eyes of God. In this sense, the change of her appearance is not merely a disguise of her female identity, but also, and to the contrary, a marker for her new pious identity. Thus, the narration of this aspect of the saint's performance supports the story's message of spiritual transformation and penitence.

We may note at this point that, in a similar fashion, the theme of clothing is rehearsed in the *Life of John* in order to support his holy identity. The changes to his

[29] On the stereotypical disguise of the cross-dressers, see Constantinou 2005, 109.

[30] Capron 2013, 152.

[31] For the *Life*'s theatrical and dramatic dimension, see Capron 2013, esp. 168–69.

[32] *VTheo* 27.9–11: ἀπεθύσατο [sic] τὰ ἱμάτια ἃ ἦν ἐνδεδυμένη καὶ τὸν κόσμον τοῦ χρυσοῦ ὃν ἐφόρει καὶ ἐκείρατο τὴν κόμην τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτῆς· καὶ ἀνεδύσατο τὰ ἱμάτια τοῦ ἀνδρὸς αὐτῆς.

appearance which take place before his return are indeed crucial to understand why he is not recognized by his parents, but at the same time they are also firm traces of his ascetic behaviour. At the end of the narrative, John forbids his parents to bury him in anything else but the simple clothes he is wearing, an order which his mother fails to obey.[33] Being miraculously punished for this,[34] she not only gives in to the saint's final wishes, but also becomes living proof of the sanctity of John.

Finally, the *Life of Symeon Salos* is the only one among the narratives discussed in this chapter which can be dated with more certainty because we know it is composed by a seventh-century author, Leontius of Neapolis.[35] In this *Life*, the saint resorts to rather unusual means in order to make his appearance support his act of foolishness. After having lived in the desert for years together with his dear friend John, Symeon returns to society and goes to Emesa where he plays the fool and pretends to be crazy: he runs around naked, harasses women, defecates in public, but he also performs miracles.[36] His goal is to secretly edify the people in the city, without revealing his holy identity. Only his close friend John the deacon (not the same John as the one he lived with in the desert) knows from the beginning who he really is. Upon entering Emesa for the first time, Symeon ties a dead dog to his belt and drags it along,[37] thus instantly establishing his reputation as a fool. At several occasions thereafter he appears naked in public; his disguise consists of few clothes, as it is precisely the lack of clothes that marks his position as fool.[38] Nonetheless, as in the two *Lives* discussed above, the saint's physical appearance is altered in order to support his/her performance, ultimately concealing his/her true identity, which can only be revealed when at the end the disguise is somehow uplifted; literally, in the case of Theodora, figuratively in the case of Symeon, whose body shows a final transformation after his death as it miraculously disappears, thereby making the citizens understand the true – that is holy – identity of Symeon. In John's case, as we have seen, it takes two more changes of dress (into the golden threaded clothing and back into his beggar's clothes) to have his mother fully recognize the holy identity of her son.

[33] *VJohn* 12.30: ἐνέδυσεν αὐτὸν χρυσόστημα ἱμάτια. Thus, just as in the *Life of Theodora*, the detail of the golden finery (χρυσόστημα), associated with a perverse lifestyle that the saint has abandoned, serves to underline the holy identity of the saint.

[34] *VJohn* 12.29–33.

[35] On this author and the dating of the *Life of Symeon*, see among others Mango 1984 and Déroche 1995.

[36] For a discussion of the miracles performed by Symeon, see Déroche 2000, 47–52.

[37] *VSym* 79.21–23.

[38] For further discussion on the 'mask of the fool' and his nakedness as a costume denoting folly, see Constantinou 2014.

PERFORMANCE STRATEGY

While (the literary portrayal of) the saint's performance relies in important ways on the saint's disguise, constituted by his/her outward appearance, this is not enough to render it successful; also the sayings and deeds of the saint must be in line with the identity (s)he projects and support the dissimulation of what (s)he wants to conceal (whether that means dissimulation of one's parentage, one's sex or one's sanctity). Throughout the *Life of John*, the saint's performance builds on the sophisticated use of rhetoric and subterfuge. Even in the first part of the narrative, when he is strictly speaking not yet 'in disguise' because he has not yet hidden his identity, John hides his intentions from his parents and other characters who might obstruct his plans to leave, and comes up with all kinds of ruses to deceive them. For example, he tricks his parents into giving him a Bible and, later, a large sum of money in order to pay for a rented boat on which he escapes. To do so, John engages in rhetorically and psychologically sophisticated speech. For instance, when addressing his mother, he employs *captatio benevolentiae* ("Dear mother, you who have raised me so beautifully from the beginning, in a way that few mothers do with their own children"[39]), capturing the goodwill of his audience before asking for favours. Also, he comes up with false stories that his parents, who are characterized by worldly ambition and vainglory, can relate to ("I ask one more favour from you that adds to your own prestige" or "I can no longer go to school without risking humiliation"[40]), thus adopting the perspective of his audience in order to maximize the impact of his performance and ultimately be more persuasive. Towards the end of the story, when his death is near, John wants to see his mother one final time. He knows, however, that she will not easily agree to see him, as she has been acting violently towards him. Therefore, he approaches the housekeeper, who, on the contrary, has been benevolent, and asks him to deliver a message to her, saying:

> I ask you, my lord, have pity on me as always, and help me by telling our mistress the following: "the beggar that lies at your gates, the one you ordered to be chased away, implores you through me, saying: 'do not treat the poor beggar arrogantly but be so kind as to speak to him forbearingly.'"[41]

[39] *VJohn* 7.31: κυρία μου μήτηρ, ἡ καλῶς ἀναθρεψαμένη με ἐξ ἀρχῆς ὡς ὀλίγαι μητέρες ἀνέθρεψαν τὰ ἴδια τέκνα

[40] E.g. *VJohn* 7.33–34: νῦν ἔτι μίαν αἴτησιν αἰτοῦμαι παρ' ὑμῶν εἰς ὑμέτερον καύχημα, or 7.37–38: οὔτε εἰς διατριβὴν δύναμαι ἀπέρχεσθαι ὑπὸ τῆς ἐντροπῆς ἁλισκόμενος.

[41] *VJohn* 11.27–31: δέομαί σου, κύριέ μου, ἐλέησόν με ὡς καὶ πάντοτε, καὶ διακόνησόν με πρὸς τὴν κυρίαν ἡμῶν τάδε· ὅτι ὁ πτωχὸς ὁ πρὸς τὴν πύλην σου κείμενος, ὃν ἐκέλευσας διωχθῆναι, παρακαλεῖ δι' ἐμοῦ λέγων μὴ ὑπερηφανήσῃς τὸν πτωχὸν καὶ πένητα, ἀλλὰ ἀνεξικάκως θέλησον αὐτῷ λαλῆσαι. The text of PG 114, 580 has a slightly different reading at the end of this passage, building up even more narrative suspense: ἀλλὰ καταξίωσον ἔλθειν πρὸς αὐτὸν, ὅτι ἔχει ἵνα πρὸς σε εἴπῃ.

In this passage, which entails a complex accumulation of embedded speech, John plays on the idea of a message withheld and manages to raise a certain curiosity in his mother ("What could that beggar have to tell me [...]?"[42]), who is finally won over to meet him. Moreover, the rhetorical complexity of the passage shifts our attention towards the performance of the text; the rhetorical character of the saint's performance is not just referenced in this sentence, it is constructed by it. This passage demonstrates that, in the case of John's rhetorical speech, the performance of the saint in disguise *is* textual performance as the one directly constitutes the other.[43] Here, moreover, the effect of curiosity that this passage has on John's mother is mirrored in the narrative suspense that it raises for the reader, who perceives not only the performance of the saint, but also that of the text.

Like John's, Theodora's performance entails more than just putting on a disguise. However, in making sure that her deeds and her words support her performed identity, she adopts a strategy which is very different from John's. While the latter reaches his goals through the clever use of speech and rhetoric, making up stories and devising ruses, Theodora speaks very little, and when she speaks, she never says anything that is far removed from the truth. When she first enters the monastery and is questioned by the abbot, she tells him that she came to atone, which we know is true.[44] In fact, the only thing she lies about is her name, and even then, her answer to the abbot's question ("Theodore") is remarkably close to the truth.[45] A little later in the narrative, Theodora is sent to the city to run an errand and encounters her husband. Instead of hiding from him, as a saint in disguise may be expected to do, she approaches him and says to him plainly (and truthfully!): "Greetings, my man".[46] Nevertheless, he still fails to recognize her, despite the clear instructions he received earlier from an angel, who, in reply to his request to show him his wife,[47] told him the exact location where he would meet her and that "whoever should meet you there, this is your wife".[48] Of course, the ambiguity of Theodora's words (does 'man' mean 'husband'?) allows for this failure of

[42] *VJohn* 11.32–3: καὶ ἄρα τί μοι ἔχει λαλήσειν ὁ πτωχὸς οὗτος [...];

[43] See MacLean 1988, 11–12 for a general discussion of the performative function of dialogue and direct speech.

[44] *VTheo* 28.10–11.

[45] Theodora is certainly not the only cross-dresser who adopts the male version of her female name (e.g. Marina/Marinos or Pelagia/Pelagios), but there are plenty of counterexamples as well (e.g. Euphrosyne/Smaragdus or Susanna/John). For further discussion of the cross-dressers' male names, see Constantinou 2005, 109–11 and Lubinsky 2013, 116 and 149–52.

[46] *VTheo* 30.7–8: χαῖρε ἄνερ μου καὶ κύριε.

[47] *VTheo* 29.18: δεῖξόν μοι αὐτήν.

[48] *VTheo* 30.1–2: ὄρθρισον ἐπὶ τὴν ὁδὸν τοῦ μαρτυρίου Πέτρου τοῦ ἀποστόλου καὶ ὅστις ἂν προσαγορεύσῃ σοι αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ γυνή σου.

recognition (which was triggered in the very first place by her male attire[49]) to take place against all odds. Interestingly, this strange situation is reversed later in the narrative.[50] When Theodora is attacked by the devil, she herself becomes the audience of the devil's performance, who appears to her disguised as her husband and tries to tempt her to return to her secular life. Just like her husband, she does not recognize the real identity of the performer, but, while her husband actually meets his wife and does not realise it, Theodora merely sees a phantasm and thinks it is her husband. The situation is thus highly similar and exactly opposite at the same time. Insofar as he can make Theodora believe he is her husband, the devil's act is successful. Moreover, his speech is rhetorically elaborate and psychologically convincing, reminding us of the kind of performance displayed in the *Life of John*. Nevertheless, contrary to John's speeches, the devil's performance eventually fails to attain its goal: even in the belief that it is her husband who begs her to come home and forgives her for what she did, Theodora turns down the proposal, devoted as she is to her life of asceticism. In the *Life of Theodora*, then, subterfuge and rhetorical embellishment are not a valued performance strategy (contrary to the *Life of John*, where they allow the saint to reach sanctity). In this *Life*, such devilish tricks do not work on Theodora, while she herself manages to put up a successful performance with a minimum of lying. When she speaks, she adheres to the truth; her rhetoric simply consists in omitting those parts of the truth that would break her cover.

Finally, Symeon certainly looks like a fool, but in addition he continuously acts like one. He babbles,[51] throws things,[52] dances around,[53] eats insatiably,[54] and "sometimes he pretended to have a limp, sometimes he jumped around, sometimes he dragged himself along on his buttocks, sometimes he stuck out his foot for someone running and tripped him".[55] Thus, his performance relies heavily on the public display of certain behaviour that may easily be interpreted as signs of an unstable mental condition.

[49] *VTheo* 30.2–4: ὁ ἀνὴρ αὐτῆς εἶδεν τὰς καμήλους καὶ αὐτὴν μετ' αὐτῶν καὶ ἐν τῷ φορεῖν αὐτὴν ἀνδρικὸν σχῆμα σύρουσα τὰς καμήλους οὐκ ἐγνώρισεν αὐτὴν ὅλως.

[50] On the structure of the *Life of Theodora* which consists of different pairs of mirroring passages, see Capron 2013, 127–28.

[51] E.g. *VSym* 89.24.

[52] E.g. *VSym* 79.26–27.

[53] E.g. *VSym* 81.13–4 and 85.24.

[54] E.g. *VSym* 82.12 and 94.25–95.2.

[55] *VSym* 89.20–22: ἦν γὰρ ποιῶν ἑαυτὸν ποτὲ μὲν κοξαρίζοντα, ποτὲ δὲ πηδῶντα, ποτὲ δὲ συρόμενον εἰς τὰ καθίσματα, ποτὲ δὲ βάλλοντα πόδα τινὶ τρέχοντι καὶ ῥίπτοντα αὐτόν.

Moreover, by speaking in riddles and scandalizing or insulting his interlocutors, Symeon can perform his edifying work without detection.[56]

PLOT

All three saints discussed in this chapter engage in practices that support the dissimulation of certain aspects of their identities and/or establish the performance of another identity. At the same time, the particularities of each performance differ as a result of each text's particular narration strategies. Moreover, in the *Life of John*, the saint's performance is further interwoven with the narrative's construction as it is made operative on the level of the plot as a driving force that provokes narrative development. The plotline roughly follows a threefold structure involving departure/separation, adventure, and return/recognition. The story thereby subscribes to a universal structure of romance that underlies different types of literature, from the pagan Greek novels to saints' *Lives*.[57] Also the *Life of Theodora* follows this threefold scheme.[58] In John's *Life*, the saint's rhetorical skill and successful ruses inform this prevalent plot-structure as they result in important plot-development: the money John receives from his parents is his means to depart and leave home, and the Bible he receives becomes the catalyst for the recognition in the end. Thus, the two crucial breaking points in the *Life*'s circular plot, namely the *topos* of 'secret flight' (as Alice G. Elliott calls it[59]) and the recognition, depend on his ability to use subterfuge and on the success of his performance.

In its own way, Theodora's performance is also operative on plot-level. As we have seen, Theodora's rhetoric does not consist of elaborate and sophisticated speech, but of minimalism and ambiguity. It is precisely this quality of Theodora's performance that proves decisive in the crucial turning point of the story. When Theodora is falsely accused of fathering a child, she hardly defends herself, but merely says "I am not responsible" (οὐκ ἔχω πράγμα).[60] Once again, she simply tells the truth, in three little words. Theodora's performance strategy has serious consequences; it leads to her punishment. Things take a different turn in, for instance, the *Life and Martyrdom of Eugenia* (BHG 607w–z), another cross-dresser's tale in which the saint is falsely accused of

[56] I do not go into detail with regard to Symeon's performance strategy because the main aspects of it have been discussed by others; e.g. Krueger 1996, 43–52 and Déroche 2000, 52–59.

[57] The structure of romance has famously been described by Northrop Frye (1976). Its applicability to hagiography is demonstrated by A. G. Elliott (1987). See also Boulhol 1996, who focuses on the final stage of the threefold plot-structure, the recognition scene. Further on recognition see Eriksen above.

[58] See Papaconstantinou 2004, 67 and 70.

[59] Elliott 1987, 85.

[60] *VTheo* 36.2.

sexual harassment. Eugenia's reaction stands in stark contrast to that of Theodora; after a highly rhetorical speech, she dramatically unveils her breasts, showing the proof of her innocence. In the *Life of Theodora*, on the contrary, the saint submits to the punishment. As such, the fake crime she is accused of as a man functions as a stand-in for the real crime she committed as a woman and allows her to atone for the latter one. The performance of the saint in the *Life of Theodora* is thus made functional for its plot because it allows to postpone the moment of recognition and the trials to continue; as such, Theodora's performance helps to underline the story's message of penitence.

The *Life of Symeon*, finally, also entails flight from the world and return/recognition.[61] Initially, Symeon seeks confinement in the desert. Moreover, his turning to the city of Emesa does not necessarily imply a return to society, as his performances of folly place him rather at the margins or even outside of society. Like Theodora, it is only after his death that Symeon is recognized for who he really is. If in the previous two *Lives* the saint's performance is made functional within the plot-structure of separation and reunion, in the *Life of Symeon*, the saint's performance does something else. Rather than triggering narrative development, Symeon's acts of foolery constitute the entire second half of the narrative. From the moment he enters Emesa until the moment he dies, his performance guides the story from one episode into the next,[62] functioning as the backbone of the narrative, which takes the form of a paratactic concatenation of scenes. Symeon's performance is much more involved with creating a false identity than with hiding his real one. He actively seeks out his audience, unlike John and Theodora, whose performance is triggered only when confronted with an audience that cannot know their true identities in order to reach their goals. Symeon's goal is precisely to act like a fool and thereby to save souls. As a result, his performance does not inform the cyclical movement of separation and recognition, which becomes much less accentuated in this *Life* compared to the other two *Lives*. If in the *Lives* of John and Theodora the saint's performance is made operative on the level of plot, it also somehow remains subject to it. In the *Life of Symeon*, the saint's performance takes over as it dictates the narrative's structure.

[61] See Krueger 1996, 37–38 for how the *Life of Symeon* adheres to and deviates from patterns established in classic hagiographical texts.

[62] A new episode often begins with a reference to the saint's performance, e.g. "it was the saint's habit to enter into the houses of the wealthy and clown around" (VSym 85.10–11), or "often he skipped and danced, holding hands with one dancing-girl" (VSym 88.29), or "for sometimes when Sunday came, he took a string of sausages and wore them" (VSym 94.26).

AUDIENCE

An important literary feature of narratives about saints in disguise, triggered in particular by the fact that their stories deal with a performing saint, is their conscious play on the knowledge-level of different members of the saint's audience. That audience consists of both the intra-diegetic audience (i.e. the other characters in the story) and the extra-diegetic audience, the reader, who witnesses not only the saint's performance, but also the narrative's textual performance.

In the first place, telling a story about a disguised saint creates an opportunity to play on a difference between the level of knowledge of the reader, who is in on the reality of the saint's identity and knows what hides behind his/her performance,[63] and the characters in the story, who usually are not. In the first part of the *Life of John*, when the saint invents different ruses to deceive the intra-diegetic audience, the only character who is fully aware of John's intentions is the monk who helps him escape. The lack of knowledge of his father and mother, on the other hand, leads to wrong impressions on their part. When John asks them for a Bible, his mother interprets this as devotion to his worldly education, and "is delighted".[64] This remark takes on extra significance when we take into account the knowledge of the reader. Throughout the narrative, the reader is informed about John's plans, for example through his conversations with the monk, but sometimes also through the representation of internal dialogue.[65] In the example here, the discrepancy between the knowledge of the reader and that of the characters leads to an effect of dramatic irony:[66] when the text says that John's mother "is delighted" when he asks for a Bible, the reader knows that she would not be if she knew the real purpose of John's request (becoming a monk and leaving her).

The *Life of Theodora* engages in a similar play on the difference in the knowledge-level of the characters (who have no knowledge concerning the real identity of the saint) and of the reader (who does). The fact that the other monks in the monastery do not know about Theodora's female nature becomes evident in their direct speech, in which they refer to her by using male pronouns.[67] Again, such instances help to create a certain irony for the reader, especially when the characters' misconceptions lead to the

[63] For most narratives about disguised saints this is indeed the case. Exceptions are first-person narrations, such as the *Life of Pelagia* (BHG 1478), where the reader has access to the same information as (part of) the text-internal audience. About the *Life of Pelagia* Ruth Webb comments that, while usually the reader knows more than the characters, in the narrative of Pelagia, "we the readers must imitate the characters within the story and trust what we are told" (2008, 212).

[64] *VJohn* 6.37–8: Ἀκούσασα δὲ ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ ἐχάρη ὅτι οὕτως φιλοπόνως ἔχει περὶ τὴν μάθησιν.

[65] E.g. *VJohn* 6.26: λέγει ἐν ἑαυτῷ.

[66] Krueger already observes that this is a common feature of stories about concealed sanctity (1996, 71 point 7).

[67] E.g. *VTheo* 28.4: δεχόμεθα αὐτὸν.

paradoxical outcome of a woman being accused of fathering a child. At the same time, the irony adds to the reader's deep experience of the saint's humility *and* it builds up narrative tension, anticipating some kind of resolution at the end. All these effects are constructed by the appearance of male pronouns referring to the saint in the direct speech of the other characters. Even more striking, however, is that male pronouns referring to Theodora occasionally also appear outside of the other characters' direct speech, in narrator-text.[68] Whereas the narrator of the *Life of Theodora* nearly always refers to the saint with female pronouns, suddenly, when Theodora enters the monastery, the narrator says that "the abbot took *him* in his cell and said to *him*" (ἔλαβε δὲ αὐτὸν ὁ ἀρχιμανδρίτης ἐν τῷ κελλίῳ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ).[69] Here, the male pronoun does something else; it achieves an effect of focalisation by presenting the events from the perspective of the other characters who perceive Theodora as a man; in this case the perspective of the abbot.[70] The narrator switches again to female pronouns to refer to Theodora once the scene has ended,[71] thus resuming his position as omniscient narrator. The sudden switch from female to male pronouns to refer to the protagonist in narrator-text is marked (one could even say that the reader is confronted with a changed 'appearance' of the text, whose narrator takes on some kind of disguise) and therefore clearly highlights the text's performance: it temporarily disregards the difference in the level of knowledge between intra-diegetic and extra-diegetic audience and invites the reader to forget, at least for the duration of the scene, the real identity of the saint (as the narrator seemingly does). The text thus merges the two levels of performance as the reader identifies with the intra-diegetic audience.

Another form of textual performance that involves a play on the knowledge-level of the audience is not concerned with what the intra-diegetic and the extra-diegetic audiences know, but builds on differences between different members of the intra-diegetic audience. In the *Life of John*, as we saw, there is one character in particular who knows more than others: the monk who helps John escape. However, the narrative construction of this *Life* seems to rely not so much on the fact that the knowledge-levels of some

[68] This phenomenon is shared by other texts on cross-dressing saints; I give an overview of the occurrence of pronoun-shifts in Greek *Lives* of cross-dressers in a book chapter which is currently under preparation on "Focalisation, immersion and fictionalisation" in which I discuss and interpret this phenomenon.

[69] *VTheo* 28.8.

[70] Another example is found in *VTheo* 32.4–7, where the scene is focalized from the perspective of a group of soldiers who encounter the saint: ὁ δὲ ἀπελθὼν [...] καὶ εἶπον αὐτῷ οἱ στρατιῶται [...] ὁ δὲ εἶπεν [...]. For further discussion of pronoun-shifts in cross-dressers' *Lives* in terms of focalisation, as well as on the occurrence of male pronouns in versions of the *Life of Theodora* other than the text given in Wessely's edition, I refer once again to the chapter I am preparing (see note 68).

[71] *VTheo* 29.1: ἡ δὲ δεξαμένη [...].

characters differ, but rather on the fact that they do not. John's father and mother have the same level of knowledge concerning John's intentions and identity throughout the narrative, and yet in the second part of the *Life*, when John returns home disguised as a beggar, his performance leads to different reactions of each. This contrasts with the beginning of the narrative, where the narrator repeatedly mentions that John's parents are in agreement concerning everything they provide for their son, thereby emphasizing their like-mindedness.[72] However, before his departure, John's father is never a direct witness of his son's performance: each time John wants to obtain something, he approaches his mother alone, who easily falls for his false excuses related to prestige and humiliation. She then tells her husband and persuades him to agree. When John appears as a beggar in front of his parents' house for the first time, on the other hand, both parents are equal witnesses of John's performance, and strikingly, this leads to very different reactions of each. While John's father takes pity on the beggar who lives on his porch and sends him food, his mother has him dragged away.[73] Contrary to the mother, who remains blind until the very end, John's father understands that God acts through his secret servants.[74] He is also the one who recognizes the Bible and who realises that they should fulfil John's last wishes and bury him in his beggar's clothes. When John approaches his mother alone once more right before his death, the situation we found in the first part of the narrative is reversed: this time, when the mother reports to her husband what the saint told her, it is the father who persuades the mother to do as the saint says. The difference in character between John's father and mother is highlighted by the fact that they react very differently when witnessing the same performance with the same level of knowledge. Moreover, through the careful selection of his audience, John's performance further plays into the disparate characterization of the two most important secondary characters, as it allows to highlight gradual character development in the figure of the father, and at the same time mark out the contrast with the figure of the mother, who, even after having recognized her son, has not yet learned the lesson her husband had understood already long ago.

Like the *Life of John*, the *Life of Symeon* engages in a literary game that is concerned with what the different members of the intra-diegetic audience know. In this case, the game depends on the fact that not all characters have the same knowledge-level; some

[72] E.g. *VJohn* 8.5: Καὶ ἤρεσεν ἀμφοτέρους ἡ βουλὴ αὕτη. The text in PG 114, 572 reads: ἤρεσκεν ἡ βουλὴ αὕτη ἀμφοτέρῳ. The dual form seems to enhance even more the representation of the two characters as a unity.

[73] *VJohn* 11.3–9.

[74] *VJohn* 11.5–6: δυνατὸς ἐστιν ὁ Θεὸς δι' αὐτοῦ σῶσαι καὶ ἡμᾶς. This thematic focus aligns the *Life of John* with other hagiographical tales discussed by Ivanov 1998 and in particular with the *Narrations* by Daniel of Sketis, discussed by Dahlman 2007, 70–89.

know more than others. Generally, the people in Emesa, the audience of Symeon's act of folly, believe Symeon to be an actual madman. However, apart from Symeon's close friend John the deacon, who knows from the beginning who Symeon really is, other citizens sometimes also acquire a higher level of knowledge than everybody else. For example, the poushka-seller and his wife accidentally witness Symeon burning incense in his hands without being hurt by the heat.[75] As soon as Symeon notices he has company, he starts shaking his hands and pretends he is burnt, but to no avail. Another time, a certain man accidentally sees Symeon conversing with two angels, thus realizing that Symeon is no fool indeed.[76] These events are what we may call 'inopportune intrusions' into the 'backstage' area; they seem beyond the saint's control and create some kind of 'disruption' of his performance as fool.[77] However, inevitably, those citizens who are edified by Symeon also start realizing he is not a fool, but a saint.[78] Such insights are a threat to Symeon's reputation as well, and point at the inherent paradox that his performance involves: he wants to edify the citizens, but he does not want to be recognized as a holy person. This is why Symeon often tries to save his performance by immediately performing an act of foolery, either in reaction to disruptive events or after edifying a person.[79] For instance, when the tavern-keeper is edified, Symeon pretends to assault his wife.[80] Other times, more drastic measures are taken, in which case he silences the character who knows about his holiness either through violence or with the help of God, so that (s)he will not spread his secret (he miraculously seals the

[75] *VSym* 80.20–81.1.

[76] *VSym* 88.12–14.

[77] I borrow the terms 'inopportune intrusion', 'backstage' and 'disruption' from Erving Goffman (1990[4] [1959]), who discusses performance in everyday life. He emphasizes that at any time events may occur that 'disrupt' the performance, "discrediting or contradicting the definition of the situation that is being maintained" (1990[4], 231–2). Apart from 'unmeant gestures', other types of disruptive events are 'inopportune intrusions', 'faux pas' and 'scenes' (Goffman 1990[4], 203–6). The 'backstage' or 'back region' is defined by Goffman as a place "where action occurs that is related to the performance but inconsistent with the appearance fostered by the performance", opposed to the 'front region', "where a performance is or may be in progress" (1990[4], 135).

[78] Of course, such realizations are often paired with a lot of doubt and speculation on the part of the citizens, e.g. *VSym* 90.11–13.

[79] Symeon's efforts to save his reputation as a fool can be understood within the framework of Goffman's concept of 'impression management'; to avoid disruptions of the performance, which threaten the reality sponsored by it, performers rely on different techniques and 'preventive practices', "employed for saving the show" (1990[4], 207), as well as 'corrective practices', "employed to compensate for discrediting occurrences that have not been successfully avoided" (24).

[80] *VSym* 81.25–82.4. Another example occurs when the slave-master who is edified by Symeon suspects that Symeon only pretends to be crazy: Symeon "immediately played the fool and pretended that he did not know what the man was saying" (*VSym* 96.6–7).

lips of the man who saw him conversing with the angels, for instance).[81] Nevertheless, it is always stated explicitly that the citizen's inability to speak about what happened to him/her only lasts as long as the saint is alive, and that after his death, (s)he proclaims the story openly.[82] In the *Life of Symeon*, then, knowledge about the saint's true identity on the part of another character functions as an assurance of transmission of the saint's (story of) sanctity;[83] the narrator can refer to this knowledge as a source of information on the saint's conduct, which allows him to deal with the inherent paradox involved in the performance, not of the saint, but of the text, namely to tell the story of a *secret* saint. The same mechanism underlies the whole text through the foreknowledge of John the deacon, who functions as the "témoin bien informé," to use Hippolyte Delehaye's famous expression.[84] The narrator claims to have heard the story of Symeon from John the deacon, who is presented as a close friend of Symeon and thus as a reliable source. In the *Life of Symeon*, then, the text's performance involves a strategy of establishing authorization and narrative reliability; by cleverly using the intra-diegetic audience, the text builds up its own credibility towards the extra-diegetic audience and deals with the problem inherent in telling a story of something secret and unknown. We may wonder why this text-internal authentication strategy, which builds on the intra-diegetic audience, occurs in the *Life of Symeon* and not in the *Lives* of John and Theodora: the disguised nature of the latter's real identities eventually poses the same problem to their hagiographers, namely how to justify that knowledge about the saint's secret identity which qualifies them to put it down into a narrative. Apparently, in the case of the beggar saint and the cross-dresser, this was not perceived as a problem in the way that it was for the holy fool. The reason may be that what is concealed in the case of these disguised saints is something else than what is concealed in Symeon's case; the holy fool, as we saw, is a 'secret saint' in the strict sense of the term, as it is his holiness which is concealed. Whereas in the case of John and Theodora, the recognition scene provides certain proof of the real identity of the saint (the cross-dresser's body undoubtedly ensures her female nature, and the parents' recognition of their son is confirmed by the Bible which functions as final material proof), holiness is a more fluid concept for which there may never be absolute proof (is he a saint or a possessed madman?), which means that the truth of Symeon's sanctity lying underneath his

[81] Another example is *VSym* 87.15–17, where Symeon burns the lips of the men who witness his gift of prophecy.

[82] And indeed: "But when they opened the grave, they did not find him. For the Lord had glorified him and translated him. *Then all came to their senses*, as if from sleep, and told each other what miracles he had performed for each of them and that he had played the fool for God's sake" (*VSym* 102.26–29, my emphasis).

[83] See also Krueger 1996, 70 (point 1).

[84] Delehaye 1966, 182.

performance of folly needs to be confirmed by other sources. The occurrence of disruptions of the saint's performance helps do that, as they result in a higher level of knowledge of some characters compared to others, ensuring the transmission of his story.[85] At the same time, the paradox of the text and the paradox of the saint's performance are inextricably related, as Symeon's performance implies some kind of double game of spreading deception and truth at the same time.

CONCLUSIONS

In this article, I set out to analyse and compare the role of the disguised saint's 'performance' in the narrative construction of three *Lives*; the *Life of John Kalyvites*, the *Life of Theodora of Alexandria* and the *Life of Symeon Salos*. Discussing the interplay between intra-diegetic performance and 'textual performance,' I wanted to show how these texts generate an interesting play on the different levels of performance the reader witnesses.

Whereas such or similar observations have occasionally been made with regard to *Lives* of cross-dressers and holy fools,[86] in fact, they apply to a larger group of Byzantine hagiographical tales that feature disguised identity. By reading the *Life of John Kalyvites* alongside a *Life* of a cross-dresser and a holy fool, we were able to observe certain narrative and structural similarities between these *Lives* that go beyond a mere thematic focus on disguised identity. Furthermore, this parallel reading has allowed us to demonstrate, firstly, that the literary portrayal of the saints' performances varies in accordance

[85] The *Life of Theodora* does not feature any disruptions of the saint's performance, even if the story presents a convenient opportunity for a dramatic turn of events towards the end of the narrative when a couple of monks listen in on a conversation between Theodora and the child, at which point Theodora does not realise she has an audience (*VTheo* 41). As readers, we might expect that this 'inopportune intrusion' of audience members into the 'backstage' of the saint's performance will constitute the way in which the intra-diegetic audience will find out about the saint's real sex. In the privacy of her cell, Theodora could be expected to drop her guard and display behaviour contradicting her performance as a male monk. However, she does not reveal anything. We have seen that the narration of Theodora's performance mainly promotes truth rather than deception; in this light, the lack of disruptions is less surprising. In the *Life of John*, in which the saint's performance has much more to do with deception, two disruptions occur, both due to a lack of self-control on the part of the saint, who bursts out in tears when seeing his parents (*VJohn* 10.35–36 and 12.20–21). The first is visible only to the readers, not to the intra-diegetic audience, and the second occurs right before John reveals his identity and dies. Therefore, these disruptions mainly serve to emphasize John's emotional predicament towards the reader and are active on the level of characterization.

[86] Arietta Papaconstantinou (2004) argues for the *Life of Theodora* that the narrative practises a 'double entendre' as it is erotic in a dissimulated way, rendering the text itself in a way transvestite and ambivalent, like its protagonist. As such, she aligns the saint's performance and textual performance through a focus on the *Life*'s erotic dimension.

with the narrative strategies of each text and coincides with the narrative's textual performance in the case of the disguised saint's direct speech. Secondly, it demonstrated the way in which the saint's performance can be made operative on the level of plot, for instance as a driving force within the universal narrative structure of separation-adventure-recognition (in the case of both the *Life of John* and the *Life of Theodora*). In the *Life of Symeon*, the saint's performance takes over as it is elevated to plot level, dictating the structure of the narrative. Finally, we have seen that all three *Lives* exploit the double audience of the saint's performance (the intra- and extra-diegetic audience) for certain literary effects. The saint's performance informs the text's literary game of taking perspective, creating irony through detachment between the two audiences, or, on the contrary, identification through focalisation. A play on the knowledge level of the intra-diegetic audience of the saint's performance can inform the narrative's processes of characterization, and finally, the intra-diegetic audience can be used as a source for textual self-justification towards the extra-diegetic audience.

The three *Lives* discussed here thus help to illustrate the way in which writing a story of performance (i.e. role-playing and disguised identity) allows and sometimes requires the text to 'perform' accordingly. I do not want to claim that the narrative mechanisms I have discussed are exclusively found in *Lives* of saints in disguise, but the analysis at least helps to create insight into how Christian narratives on disguised saints work. Moreover, by including the *Life of John Kalyvites* in the discussion, we could not only broaden our perspective on the topic but also refine it through a more detailed differentiation between different types of disguise and performance in hagiography. In any case, the fascination of Greek hagiographical literature for the *topos* of secrecy and concealed identity can be understood as contributing to sophisticated, but perhaps above all entertaining narratives.[87]

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